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Supervisor: Maria Småberg

National identity construction from non-alignment to Nato membership

A critical discourse analysis of the Swedish peace identity as
constructed in the newspaper media discourse on Nato
membership

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Alva Mårtensson

Abstract

How can we understand the historical development of the Swedish national identity construction in terms of non-alignment and internationalism in the media discourse on Nato membership? Since the end of the Cold War, Sweden has been conducting increasing cooperation with Nato, putting its non-alignment and related internationalist identity narrative into question. Starting from the social constructivist assumption that national identity narratives interact with foreign policy through constructing boundaries for possible behavior, I argue that insights about the Swedish advancement towards Nato can be gained from studying how its national identity is constructed in the newspaper debate. I employ critical discourse analysis to illuminate discursive strategies that construct, perpetuate, transform and dismantle aspects of the Swedish national identity to produce ideological effects. My material consists of 88 editorials from two of Sweden's biggest newspapers, Dagens Nyheter (favoring a Nato membership) and Aftonbladet (opposing a Nato membership) from 1994-1995, 2014-2016 and 2021-2022. My main conclusion is that the non-alignment and internationalist identity narratives are gradually disconnected from each other over time through discursive strategies that increasingly connect them to national security concerns, as tensions increase in Europe. This in turn creates a national identity narrative with which Nato membership is compatible.

Keywords: Nato, Critical discourse analysis, Swedish print media, peace identity, national identity, non-alignment, internationalism, foreign policy, social constructivism.

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1. Introduction

What has happened to the Swedish peace identity as the country, with 200 years experience of military non-alignment, has moved towards a Nato membership? Since the mid 1900s the non-alignment policy has been a fundamental part of the Swedish national identity as it has informed its liberal internationalist engagement for democracy, human rights and peaceful conflict resolution, claiming a “third way” between the superpowers in the Cold War and taking pride in the freedom to act independently of alliances through an active foreign policy (Bjereld 2007: 45-47; Wivel 2017: 490). After the end of the Cold War, Sweden continued to pursue non-alignment and engage in internationalism through the UN and EU (Wivel 2017: 493-494), but the geopolitical map has been redrawn. Tensions related to Russian intentions and actions have been increasing in Europe (Wieslander 2022). Swedish popular opinion has become increasingly positive towards joining Nato to enhance national security, although it remained low the first decade of the 2000s (Martinsson & Andersson 2021: 67). On May 16, the Swedish government made the decision to apply for a Nato membership, and leave the non-alignment policy behind (Regeringskansliet 2022).

Social constructivist theories hold that the national identity narrative sets boundaries for possible state behavior, as interests are not pre-given but constructed through shared norms and ideas about who “we” are, and hence what “we” want (Agius 2006: 42). Since the end of the Cold War, there has been an ongoing debate between those favoring to keep the non-alignment policy, and those favoring a Nato membership. In this paper, I will investigate how the discursive construction of Swedish national identity narratives in terms of non-alignment and internationalism has developed over time on each side of the debate. In this way, I want to gain an understanding of how the peace identity has interacted with foreign policy, culminating in a Nato application.

1.1 Purpose and research question

Since 1989, Sweden has moved closer towards Nato, to finally decide to apply to the alliance in 2022. This move should require a renegotiation of the non-alignment identity narrative, and the related internationalism identity narrative. The question is how.

I have chosen to investigate this development through critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the Swedish Nato debate during three time periods between the 1990s and 2022. The material consists of 88 editorials in two of Sweden's biggest newspapers, Dagens Nyheter (DN) and Aftonbladet. Their editorial pages respectively represent one standpoint in the debate.

The choice of newspaper media discourse is motivated by the central role of language in journalism (Carvalho 2008: 161). Carvalho has developed a methodology for CDA of journalistic texts which is used in this paper, and advocates for the study of issues over time: "most public issues have a significantly long 'life', which is tied to representations in the media" (2008: 164). This is what I want to capture by studying the Nato debate over time, rather than in a specific time period. The normative agenda of CDA is visible in my research through my intention to uncover how social reality and interests are discursively constructed in the Nato debate, rather than given. The central claim of CDA is that language does not merely reflect social reality, but contributes to constructing reality as well as is informed by it (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 1-5).

I want to make a reservation here about my choice of national identity as an analytical concept. My usage of national identity is not based on any personal beliefs in nations or nationalism as an ideology, but a belief that the *idea* of national identity has real, material consequences for foreign- and security policy decisions. The normative agenda of CDA in combination with national identity theory is rather to gain a better understanding in how national identity is constructed to serve power.

My research question is: *How can we understand the historical development of the discursive construction of the Swedish peace identity in terms of non-alignment and internationalism in the media discourse on the Nato membership debate?*

1.2 Disposition

Until now I have gone through my abstract, list of contents, introduction, and purpose and research question. Following this comes a section for background and sociopolitical context of my chosen periods, to prepare the reader for the following sections of theory, method and analysis. The analysis is conducted chronologically, where Dagens Nyheter and Aftonbladet are examined within each respective period. The analysis concludes with a historical comparison between the periods. Lastly, I state my conclusions and make suggestions for further research.

2. Background

First, I will elaborate on what I mean with Swedish peace identity, non-alignment and internationalism. Thereafter I will briefly go through the socio-political context of each period. This is motivated by the theoretical assumption that discourses interact with social reality (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 61-63) and that the construction of national identity is context dependent (De Cillia et al 1999: 154).

2.1 Swedish peace identity

National identity is not static but constantly changing. Still, two central aspects of the Swedish national peace identity is non-alignment and internationalism (see for example Björkdahl 2013:326; Wivel 2017). The meaning put into these concepts, on the other hand, changes depending on the context and ideological standpoint of the actor, which is what I aim to investigate. Therefore, I will give a short historical background to these concepts that will help the reader understand the discourses better.

2.1.1 Non-alignment

The official formulation for the Swedish foreign policy during the Cold War was non-alignment during times of peace, in order to be neutral in times of war. It was also called the neutrality policy. The concepts of non-alignment and neutrality are sometimes confused. Neutrality is used to describe the position during war-times, which means it is incorrect to say that Sweden was neutral during the Cold War. The correct formulation

is that Sweden pursued a neutrality policy, which included non-alignment in times of peace. The idea of neutrality in times of war is to be able to have freedom of action, and not be obliged to defend one side. Furthermore, the Swedish neutrality policy during the Cold War was supported by having a strong national defense (Bjereld 2007: 37-38), and should hence not be confused with any antimilitaristic position. During the Cold War, neutrality was important as Sweden pursued a “third way” between the US and the Soviet Union (Wivel 2017: 492). At the same time, Sweden prepared for support from Nato if the country would get involved in a larger conflict, which is sometimes referred to as a “secret” or “hidden” alliance (Fägersten & Jerdén 2018: 344). However, since the end of the Cold War, the concept of neutrality is no longer used, and it was replaced by a policy of freedom of action in combination with non-alignment (Bjereld 2007: 44). Sweden also has an official position called “solidaritetsprincipen” or the principle of solidarity. The principle states that Sweden will not remain passive if a EU-country or nordic country is attacked or stricken by a catastrophe, and expects the same action in return. In this, exchange of both civil and military support is included (Fägersten & Jerdén 2018: 344; Säkerhet i ny tid 2016: 35). However, the principle is not binding on either side but should rather be seen as a statement of intent.

2.1.2 Internationalism

Internationalism, in its simplest form, means striving to promote inter- and supranational purposes. The literature makes distinctions between different types of internationalism. Nilsson (2015) writes that liberal internationalism has been the most prevalent type in the political thinking of 20th century western Europe. It is represented by the UN, and stipulates that independent states through international economic, cultural and political cooperation can reach universal goals such as human rights and democracy (38).

The relationship between internationalism and non-alignment can be explained as follows. Goetschel (2011) writes that states can pursue neutrality or non-alignment both as a realistic survival function, seen in the light of not getting involved in wars, and an

idealistic function, acting as international norm entrepreneurs in humanitarian issues (314). According to Goetschel, this is partly due to a pressure to justify this policy to not be considered passive: “avoidance of military battles – often based on conflicting world-views – had to be compensated for by some other fundamentals or ideas of ‘grandness’” (314; see also Bjereld 2007: 47). In the Swedish case, this is illustrated by the active foreign policy during the Cold War. The ideological basis for this activism was Social Democratic values of solidarity, universality and equality (Agius 2006: 6; Wivel 2017: 490; Bjereld 2007: 47). The active foreign policy is particularly connected to the Palme era (former Social Democratic prime minister) starting in the 1960s. Sweden stood out from other western states through openly criticizing both eastern and western states, voting in solidarity with countries in the “third world” in the UN and became more active as a mediator in international conflicts. This era established the (sometimes ironic) term “moral superpower” (Bjereld 2007: 43). Since the end of the Cold War, Sweden has continued to pursue an active foreign policy but rather through the EU and the UN, the former partly having taken over the role as having the normative power (Wivel 2017: 493). The feminist foreign policy, initiated by former foreign minister Margot Wallström in 2014, is seen as a normative reorientation of foreign policy to promote gender-equality (Rosén Sundström et al 2021: 439), and can be seen as a way forward in Swedish internationalism.

2.2 Sociopolitical context

2.2.1 What is Nato?

Nato is an intergovernmental military alliance founded in 1949. It was created in response to the First and Second World War, which were seen partly as a consequence of countries pursuing national defense systems without acting within a multilateral framework. Nato uses its members' own military capacities, and does not have any organizational military capacity of its own. Article 5 of the Washington treaty states that

every country has an individual and collective responsibility to aid an allied country if this country is attacked (Säkerhet i ny tid 2016: 18). Nato is a nuclear weapons alliance, since its central security guarantee rests on, mainly, US possession of nuclear weapons (19). Nato currently has 30 member states (Nato 2020).

2.2.2 1994-1995

This is the only period characterized by general detente in Europe. Post Cold War, Russia and western countries approached each other, and Sweden began moving away from the neutrality policy (Kragh 2018: 58). Sweden joined the Partnership for Peace in 1994, which is a cooperation between Nato and non-aligned European states (Säkerhet i ny tid 2016: 118). Since then, the partnership has been used as a security political tool for Sweden to pursue national interests abroad with Nato capacity, and participate in military exercises (Säkerhet i ny tid 2016: 120). Sweden also joined the EU in 1995 preceding a referendum, which put neutrality in question because of obligations stated in the Maastricht treaty and the Rome treaty (Bjereld 2007: 45).

The SOM-institute has been conducting a yearly survey since 1994 on Swedish popular opinion towards Nato membership. Between 1994-2012, the share of respondents opposing a Nato membership application was consistently two to three times higher than the share promoting it (Berndtsson et al 2016: 242). Hence, popular support for Nato membership was low during this period.

2.2.3 2014-2016

The second period is characterized by more tension in Europe. A Swedish public investigation states that the Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 constitutes the largest threat to European security since the end of the Cold War (Säkerhet i ny tid 2016: 37). In 2016, Sweden realized the Host Nation Support

Agreement (which was signed in 2014), which has the ambition to facilitate an exchange of military support between Nato and Sweden (Säkerhet i ny tid 2016: 121). Public opinion towards Nato shifted for the first time since the SOM-institute survey began in 1994. 38% favored a Nato membership application in 2015, while 31% opposed it (Berndtsson et al 2016: 242).

2.2.4 2021-2022

During the third period, the Swedish government decided to apply for a Nato membership, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in february 2022. In the latest SOM-institute survey on public opinion from 2021, the shares of respondents favoring versus opposing a Nato membership application amounted to 29% each (Martinsson & Andersson 2021: 67). A more recent survey conducted by Sifo shows that 47% of respondents were positive towards applying for Nato membership in may 2022, which suggests a significant shift (Kantar Sifo 2022).

3. Theory and methodology

In this section, I will go through my literature review of debates relating to the Swedish national identity. After this follows theory and methodology.

3.1 Literature review

Sweden has been the subject of interest for many scholars wanting to explore the relationship between having a self-proclaimed “peaceful” national identity and foreign policy. The purpose of this literature review is to investigate what themes have been the focus of interest regarding Sweden's changing peace identity since the end of the Cold War.

One broad theme that I have identified is how the *values* embedded in Sweden’s peace identity are *exported in foreign policy*. The concept of national identity can be used to understand why states sometimes act contrary to what seems “rational” in terms of material state interests (Demker 2007:59-61). From the 1960s during the Cold War, Sweden pursued an active foreign policy, standing out from the rest of the western European countries by advocating for “third world” countries and criticizing crimes against humanity in both superpower blocks. One explanation to this behavior (which cannot be explained by realist interests in for example national security) is that the Swedish government aimed to elevate the Social Democratic ideology of equality and solidarity to the international arena (Bjereld 2007:47). Since then, after the Cold War and entrance into the EU, Sweden has continued its internationalist ambitions through

the UN and the EU instead. The Feminist Foreign Policy from 2014 is one way to “rebrand the nordic model” (Wivel 2017:491-494), something also Bergman Rosamond (2020) agrees with: “However, FFP is not Wallström’s intellectual creation alone but an attempt by the Swedish government to brand its state machinery as explicitly feminist. Self-identifying as ‘the world’s first feminist government’ Sweden has added force to this identity construction” (217-218). Björkdahl (2013) suggests that Sweden has adopted norm entrepreneurship as a foreign policy strategy to gain influence internationally through the EU and UN, which is connected to its history of supporting peacekeeping and peaceful conflict resolution (322-326). According to Björkdahl, this strategy enables small states such as Sweden to “punch above their weight in world politics” (323).

The above theme identifies how Sweden pursues values embedded in its national identity through foreign policy. Another, related theme is what happens when Swedish foreign policy *acts deviant from what is expected when self-identifying as a peace country*. Noreen and Sjöstedt (2021) shows how narrative friction occurs between a peace-nation narrative and a military culture narrative in the engagement in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, led by Nato and involving military combat (318). Noreen, Sjöstedt and Ångström (2017) further show how narratives are important to make international behavior possible, such as Sweden participating in the ISAF mission despite being a small, non-aligned state (145-147). The narrative friction is a central point here, and Sandman (2021) shows how violence in war-like operations that Sweden takes part in abroad is discursively made invisible in public discourse in order for the narrative to be accepted by the public.

When discussing narrative friction in relation to the Swedish national identity, another central theme is the one of *Nato membership*. Many authors addressing this issue see the peace identity as an obstacle to membership, which is otherwise seen as a “natural step” for Sweden to take since the end of the Cold War. Ferreira-Pereira (2005) argues that the political commitment to the traditional non-alignment hindered a Swedish Nato membership in the 1990s. Dalsjö (2017) similarly describes the Swedish approach to Nato as hesitant and anxious: that the self-image as a neutral country hinders a Nato membership although Russian aggression makes it the “natural” thing to do. Wieslander (2022), writing from a neoclassic realist perspective, argues that systemic forces (the

worsened security situation, driven by Russia) should drive Sweden towards Nato, but that domestic factors hinder “policy flexibility”. Wieslander sees the resistance to Nato as a puzzle. Finally, Berndtsson et al (2019) analyzes what they see as a public opinion paradox regarding Nato membership in that while support for membership has increased, the public is continuously favoring military non-alignment. The authors identify a discrepancy between government actions (Nato involvement) and government rhetoric (of internationalist good-doing). Regarding legitimization of Swedish security policies, the authors identify a need for a change in the national identity that permits being an activist, non-neutral force for good *in* a military alliance. Partly, this merge is already happening, for example in the feminist foreign policy as described above.

From reading the articles about Nato membership, I identify a neorealist tendency in the theoretical interpretations. The national identity of non-alignment is often referred to, but as something irrational seen in the light of contemporary security threats from the east. The above articles treating the Nato membership debate thus provides me a realist interpretation of why it has not yet happened. However, they are less informative regarding *how* the Swedish national identity is constructed, shaped and reshaped within the debate.

By contrast, Hagström (2020) comes closer to answering my question through an analysis of emotional discourses in the Nato debate between 2014-2018. Hagström shows how pro and anti-Nato influencers use disciplinary power to sanction the opponent, in order to enhance their agenda. For example, anti-Nato influencers are often ridiculed and accused of treason and naivety, and pro-Nato influencers are often ridiculed and accused of having “Russia panic” and being “bomb liberals”. Both sides, however, agree that the security situation has worsened (141-142; 150-151). I think these emotional discourses can be seen as signs of conflicting narratives about the Swedish identity and history of non-alignment, and where to go next. The pro-Nato side, however, is constructed as the normal, responsible and natural option, which Hagström sees as a way that disciplinary power works to enforce “compliance with dominant identity constructions” (144).

In this paper, I build upon the literature treating the relationship between national identity and foreign policy to investigate the historical development of non-alignment

and internationalism in the Swedish Nato membership debate. This development is especially relevant as the Swedish government in May 2022 made the decision to apply for Nato membership, and thus break with the long history of non-alignment.

3.2 Theory

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is both a theory and a method (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 60). CDA is in turn based on social constructivism. In this section, I will first outline the basic premises of social constructivist theory, and then go on to the theoretical considerations of CDA. After this, I will go through national identity theory, on which I draw mostly on de Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak (1999). The methodological aspects of CDA and national identity theory will be discussed in the methodology section. The theoretical framework is designed to demonstrate both the theoretical ideas behind discourse analysis as a method, and connect these ideas to the study of national identity.

3.2.1 Social constructivism

Social constructivism is concerned with how social reality is constructed. This social reality includes national interests and identities, which is the focus of this paper. According to Wendt, constructivism holds that “structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces’ and second, that ‘the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature’” (quoted in Agius 2006: 42). Finnemore and Sikkink (2001) writes about the constructivist focus on “social facts”, and gives the examples of money, sovereignty and rights. These are not rooted in a material reality, nor do they possess any inherent or essential meaning, but rather, they are given meaning based on that people believe in their existence, which informs their behavior (393). Social

constructivism is used in the field of international relations as an alternative to the dominating realist school, which assumes that interests are pre-defined as states always act in ways to increase their security in an anarchic international system (Brommesson & Ekengren 2007: 26-27).

3.2.2 Critical discourse analysis

Social constructivism is the foundation for discourse analysis as it analyses the relationship between language and social reality as discursive constructions and practices. A basic assumption in CDA is that “our ways of talking do not neutrally reflect our world, identities and social relations but, rather, play an active role in creating and changing them” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 1).

A *discourse* can be defined as patterns of language, or “a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 1). In terms of foreign policy, discourses can be seen as an order of talking about an issue in which foreign policy is both a result of the discourse, and contributes to the sustainment of that discourse. The discourse is a structural phenomenon, in which actors can support or dismantle the discourse. Discourses set the boundaries for what is possible to say, think and do, and challenges to the discourse are important to explain change (Demker 2007: 62).

Generally, CDA approaches share some common features. Discursive practices contribute to the constitution of the social world, but it is just one dimension of the social world. Hence, there are dimensions of the social world which are non-discursive. Furthermore, discourse is seen both as a social practice constituting the social world, and discourse is also constituted by other social practices. Hence, discourses are in a *dialectic relationship with the social reality*. Importantly, discourse is seen as having an ideological function: discursive practices have ideological effects, such as furthering the interests of one group over the other (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 61-63). Discourse relation to *ideology* is that meaning is created in service of power (75).

An important concept is *intertextuality*, which is how “individual texts draw on elements and discourses of other texts” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 7). Intertextuality can be a driver of change, when new discourses are added to an already existing one or keep the dominant discourse stable by combining discourses in conventional ways. It is a sign of both stability and instability of discourses, and the influence the course of history has on texts (73-74).

Carvalho (2008) builds on CDA and has developed a theory and method for studying journalistic texts. Carvalho suggests conducting studies of discourses over time, as public issues tend to “live” and be subject to discursive practices over many years. Also, discursive strategies of social actors should be analyzed, as journalists reconstruct events discursively mediated through others (creating two discursive interventions in an event: the social actors involved in the event, and the journalists interpretation of them). This means that the journalist’s depiction of a social issue will depend on the journalist's preferences and pre-understanding, as well as the ideological orientation of the paper. Finally, there are extra/supratextual effects of discourses in media (concrete effects) to be taken into consideration (161-165). However, an investigation of these effects are beyond the scope of this paper.

3.2.3 National identity theory

National identity theory is a constructivist theory that is used in discourse analysis. De Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak (1999) understand nations as imagined political communities, in the sense that the citizens of a country, although most of them will never meet each other (and do not necessarily share experiences), share an *idea* of belonging to a “unique national community”. The precondition for a nation to exist is the existence of *perceived boundaries* to other nations. A second aspect that feeds into the sense of a national belonging and is central to its construction is a *common history*, and a collective memory of events that are perceived for the shaping of the community. Furthermore, national identities are not static or have any inherent essence, but are constructed according to context. This makes them unstable and sometimes incoherent (154).

The workings of national identity on behavior can be thought of in terms of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*. De Cillia Reisigl and Wodak writes that:

In our view, national identity can be regarded as a sort of habitus, that is to say as a complex of common ideas, concepts or perception schemes, (a) of related emotional attitudes intersubjectively shared within a specific group of persons; (b) as well as of similar behavioural dispositions; (c) all of which are internalized through 'national' socialization. (De Cillia et al 1999: 153)

The discursively constructed national identity as internalized habitus can be understood as working as *narratives* that can "bring forth a new interpretation of the world in order to modify it" (De Cillia et al 1999: 156). The way the national identity is constructed is discussed in the methodology section in terms of discursive strategies.

I have already written that discourses are in a dialectic relationship with social reality, and produce ideological effects (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 61-63). In terms of foreign policy, identity can be seen as coming into being through the discursive practice of foreign policy, but identity is also "constructed as the legitimization for the policy proposed" (Sandman 2019: 33). To put it differently, national identity discourses and foreign policy can be seen as being in a dialectic relationship.

3.3 Methodology

In this section I outline my methodological framework. It combines the framework of Carvalho (2008) for mediated CDA with the discourse-historical approach of de Cillia et al (1999). I also operationalize the concepts used for national identity theory. Lastly, I go through my usage of the material.

3.3.1 Mediated CDA and discourse-historical analysis

Carvalho (2008) has developed a framework for (mediated) CDA of journalistic texts consisting of two parts: the textual analysis and the contextual analysis (167). I will follow this structure, but for the textual analysis I will use the discourse-historical framework of de Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak (1999), which I will describe further down.

The contextual analysis is the main idea I use from Carvalho (2008). It consists of a *comparative-synchronic analysis* and a *historical-diachronic analysis*. The former means that I will compare texts during the same period to understand different representations of the same issues. *This is done practically through structuring my analysis chronologically, and comparing the papers in each period.* Here, intertextuality also appears when comparing texts to each other. Carvalho's usage of intertextuality also has a special focus on "alternative depictions of reality", for the purpose of reading journalistic texts critically. The latter means I will examine "the course of social matters and their wider political, social and economic context", and the temporal evolution of discourses to assess the history of media constructions to understand the present state of the issues of interest. A question to ask is for example "what were the political, social and/or cultural implications of dominant discourses?" (171-172). *This is done practically through dedicating a section at the end of the analysis to draw conclusions on the historical development of discourses.*

The textual analysis is drawn from de Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak (1999). The analysis builds on three dimensions: *contents/topics, strategies and linguistic means and forms of realization* (157).

The topics are partly pre-defined since I will look for representations over time of the peace identity in terms of non-alignment and internationalism, but I remain open to other findings as well. The strategies are the most important dimension, and regards the "discursive construction, perpetuation, transformation and dismantling of nations and national identities". *Construction* are "linguistic acts which serve to 'build' and establish a particular national identity". For example, references to a "we-group", to invite solidarity with this group and create boundaries towards "others". *Perpetuation* serves to maintain the status quo of national identities, for example through justification and legitimation to preserve a narrative. *Transformation* aims at transforming some part of a national identity into something else. For example re-defining the conditions for an

aspect of a national identity, while not abandoning it. Lastly, dismantling aims to dismantle aspects of or entire national identities, for example by de-legitimizing the historical basis for an aspect to exist. Examples of sub-strategies that underpin these macro-strategies include *emphasizing national singularity, emphasis of difference between nations, positive self-representation and negative other-representation* (De Cillia et al 1999: 160-163). However, these examples are based on the Austrian case study in the de Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak (1999) paper, and I will extend the theoretical ideas of sub-strategies to find other examples in my own case.

Linguistic means for the discursive construction of national identity include for example language to express “unity, sameness, difference, singularity, continuity, change, autonomy, heteronomy, etc”. De Cillia et al suggests that the word “we” is central in this (1999: 163).

To conclude, the framework as a combination of Carvalho (2008) and de Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak (1999) looks like this:

1. Text (de Cillia et al 1999)

Topics: focus on non-alignment and internationalism

Strategies: Construction, perpetuation, transformation and dismantling strategies, including sub-strategies

Linguistic means: “we”, sameness, difference, continuity, change

2. Context (Carvalho 2008)

Comparative-synchronic analysis (comparison between texts in each period)

Historical-diachronic analysis (last section of analysis)

3.3.2 Material

My material consists of 88 editorials from two of Sweden's biggest newspapers: Dagens Nyheter (DN) and Aftonbladet. The editorial board of DN is ideologically unbound liberal (Dagens Nyheter 2008) and was throughout my time period positive towards abandoning non-alignment or joining Nato. Aftonbladet's editorial board is ideologically unbound Social Democratic (Aftonbladet 2016) and continuously promoted non-alignment until May 13th 2022 when they officially changed their opinion towards promoting a Nato membership.

The time periods I chose to investigate are 1994-1995, 2014-2016 and 2021-2022 (May 16th). These were chosen based on Carvalho's (2008) methodology of choosing critical discourse moments for analysis, which "involve specific happenings, which may challenge the 'established' discursive positions" (166). I will go through them in the background section below. I also searched the database *Svenska dagstidningar* to see when the highest amount of newspaper articles containing the word "natomedlemskap" were published, which showed accordance to my chosen periods and indicates critical discourse moments.

My sampling method consisted of searching for *nato medlem Sverige* (nato member Sweden) in the digital search engines of each paper. I then saved all editorials with these search words for each period. I hand-coded each editorial according to paper, time period (1994-1995 first period, 2014-2016 second period, 2021-2022 third period) and chronological order, which I use for referencing in the analysis. For example, D12 is the second editorial of the first period in DN. A34 is the fourth editorial in the third period of Aftonbladet. In my analysis, I excluded editorials that did not mention Swedish non-alignment or Swedish nato membership. For example, I excluded editorials that mentioned Sweden but only treated Finnish Nato membership. I am aware that I may have missed relevant articles because of human error in the sampling, and I also exclude potentially relevant articles that treat Swedish Nato membership but use words such as "entry" or "closer cooperation" instead of membership. However, because of limited resources, it helps to narrow down the amount of material. *Lastly, it is important to know that I have translated all the quotes myself, which includes the risk of deficient translation and fine nuances in meaning getting lost or distorted.*

The only period that I could not find in the newspapers own archives is Aftonbladet 1994-1995, because their archive is only digitized after the year 2000. For these editorials, I used the database *Retriever Research Mediearkivet*. Here I extended the search to (nato* AND medlem* AND sverige*) because the search without asterixis resulted in too few articles. A second issue was that the genre of the articles was not labeled. Therefore, I chose the articles that were the appropriate word count for editorials (400-900) and excluded those that I could see were for example debate articles.

I chose to work with editorials because the editorial page usually has a coherent ideological stance or even specific opinions on topics, although several different journalists contribute to the editorial page. This makes it easier for me to compare the two sides of the Nato debate as represented in these papers. However, there are downsides to using editorials. They are often written without a named author, which makes it impossible to know who or how many people have contributed to the text. This carries the risk that the editorials of one period are only written by one or two people. In that case I am investigating the discourses of one or two people rather than the editorial board. In Aftonbladet, this also turned out to be the case, as a majority of the signed editorials are written by the same person. However, I decided to accept this bias but keep it in mind.

The sampling resulted in 245 editorials, out of which 88 are included in the analysis.

Table 1: Number of editorials per paper and period. Samples included in the analysis are marked within parenthesis.

Paper/period	1994-1995	2014-2016	2021-2022	Total
Dagens Nyheter	32 (16)	37 (12)	40 (17)	109 (45)
Aftonbladet	11 (9)	75 (23)	50 (11)	136 (43)
Total	43 (25)	112 (35)	90 (28)	245 (88)

3.3.2.1 Operationalization of peace identity

The main topics I analyze are non-alignment and internationalism. The non-alignment topic includes words and phrases related to, for example, military non-alignment, freedom of alliances and neutrality. Internationalism refers to Swedish efforts to pursue inter- and supranational purposes (Nilsson 2015: 38). Internationalism in my analysis includes for example active foreign policy, international activism, participation in the EU and UN, and participation in peacekeeping missions.

4. Analysis

The analysis proceeds chronologically to permit a comparative-synchronic analysis between the texts in each period, focusing on discursive strategies to construct national identity. In the last section, I make a historical-diachronic analysis of the evolution of discourses on non-alignment and internationalism.

4.1 1994-1995

National identity narratives are constructed according to context (De Cillia et al 1999: 154). During this period of general European detente and broad popular support for continuous non-alignment, DN aims to challenge the status quo of non-alignment and mainly uses dismantling strategies (161), while Aftonbladet aims to preserve the status quo of non-alignment and mainly uses perpetuation strategies (160).

DN dismantles non-alignment in a number of ways. First, editorials make references to a common national past of non-alignment, and use rhetoric of drawing a clear line between now and then, “we are on our way to something new” (D13). Through arguing that non-alignment belongs in the past, they distance Sweden from the policy and de-legitimizes its current utility (D13; D122; D124; D125). Second, editorials dismantle the non-alignment identity through denying it was ever a useful strategy for peace. D116 describes this function as a “myth”, and refers to countries during the Second World War which were attacked despite their non-alignment. Instead, a common argument is that non-alignment would not have been possible without informal security backing from the US and Nato (D118, D124, D127). Promoters of non-alignment are often ridiculed (D17; D115; D119). For example, one editorial portrays the Social Democrats as religious fanatics: “While the rest of the country have been secularized in all other aspects, non-alignment has functioned as a state religion” (D15). In this way, the writers undermine the historical and present legitimacy of non-alignment.

Constructive strategies are instead aimed at naturalizing Nato membership, for example through claiming that Sweden is already part of Nato through working under Nato demand for the UN in Bosnia (D11; D132) and because of previous informal alliances during the Cold War (D127). DN editorials also use a discourse of opportunity with regards to abandoning non-alignment, and sees the context of detente as a preferable time to do so because it is less provocative (D12). The EU membership is used to argue that neutrality is already undermined, and construct a European identity narrative (“Sweden is together with Switzerland Europe’s most Europized country”: D116), where Sweden is independent and can freely choose to join an alliance in the new security context (D13; D114; D119).

Aftonbladet, on the other hand, uses discursive strategies to perpetuate the non-alignment identity. They similarly to DN make references to a common national past and recognize that Europe has changed since 1989, but the editorials pursue a discourse of continuity and success. They perpetuate the non-alignment identity through making references to its past success of keeping Sweden out of wars and its continuous popular support (A12; A15; A17). Pro-nato politicians are de-legitimized and portrayed as insurgents who want to disturb the successful line of non-alignment: “While the military threats in our surroundings decrease, national strife regarding defense policy increases” (A17). Aftonbladet editorials also pursue some transformation strategies. A strong national defense is constructed as a prerequisite for continuous non-alignment (A12), which can be interpreted as a response to voices advocating for Nato for national security. A transformative strategy can also be seen in one editorial through an accepting stance towards Swedish Nato advancement through the Partnership for Peace agreement because “[...] Nato’s role has changed and is becoming increasingly focused on peace oriented efforts rather than military defense” (A11), which aligns with the Swedish peace identity. At the same time, the editorials are perpetuating the non-alignment identity through constructing Nato as obsolete in the face of new, non-military security challenges (A12; A16; A18) and as a threat against Russian democratic development (A16; A18). One editorial recalls the Cold War when asking for a discussion about the “[...]risk of a new wall through Europe” (A16).

Regarding Swedish internationalism identity, the editorials are written in the context of new EU, UN and Nato participation through PFP. DN editorials use discursive strategies to transform internationalism, from being tied to the independence of non-alignment towards being *better served* through a Nato membership. Regarding PFP, one writer claims that Sweden gains the possibility to “contribute to the management of entire Europe’s security and important peace operations” (D11; see also D19). The EU is often described as the European peace project (D119, D122). The UN and Nato are also positioned together as a positive force for peace in Bosnia (D11). Aftonbladet similarly connects the internationalist agenda to the EU and UN, but proposes instead that non-alignment serves this agenda *better*. For example, “... [non-alignment] does not exclude but facilitate active international engagement for democracy, peace and disarmament in the UN, ESK, Nordiska rådet, Östersjöområdet and other international contexts” (A12; see also A13, A19, A111). This creates a positive narrative of Sweden as *acting independently* in international affairs. One editorial treating the upcoming EU membership referendum criticizes an information brochure. An argument for EU membership in the brochure is that “there must be a reason that almost all countries wants to join” (A11). The author counters with: “why, in that case, has Sweden remained outside the EU during the 37 years it has existed?” (A11).

In this section, the papers share references to important historical events during the Cold War, and both papers recognize that Europe has changed. However, their depictions and interpretations of reality differ, which is what Carvalho (2008) aims to illuminate through the comparative-synchronic analysis (172). Non-alignment is dismantled by DN to create a new identity as a Nato member, and the meaning of internationalism is transformed into being a Nato endeavor. This creates an identity narrative which legitimizes a change in foreign policy. At the same time, the PFP membership contributes to the construction of this Nato identity, showing the dialectic relationship. Aftonbladet is perpetuating the non-alignment and internationalist identity through constructing the narrative of success, legitimizing the status quo foreign policy and also drawing on it, for example by references to popular support (De Cillia et al 1999: 156).

4.2 2014-2016

In the context of increased tensions in Europe and a turn in popular opinion towards Nato, the construction of non-alignment has a different frame than the previous period of detente. In both papers, boundaries are drawn against Russia, to differentiate from. Dagens Nyheter does this by positioning Swedish security vis a vis Russian aggression, and emphasizing that Sweden is independent and should not let foreign policy decisions be controlled by Russian interests (for example, D21; D23; D24; D25). Having a lesser national defense and pursuing non-alignment is described in one editorial as sleeping with your front door open (D23), indicating that someone will inevitably attack you. The disarmament process that had been ongoing in Sweden during the 2000s is described as naive: “And why would Sweden have an army, air force and navy worth its name? There would never again be war in Europe anyways” (D27). Sweden approaching Nato is constructed deterministically, pointing to a straight line from PFP to the new Host Country Agreement (D26), and referring to the Nato debate as politicians having finally “woken up” to reality (D24; D27; D221). This de-legitimizes non-alignment as it indicates that it is not an active policy but a matter of passivity. As a further dismantling strategy, non-alignment promoters are accused of sentimentality and dogma. The Social democrats are stuck in an “ancient neutrality romanticization” (D21) or “mendacious neutrality romanticization” (D22), which is seen as an obstacle for them to see the world as it “really is”.

DN editorials also attempt to construct a new identity of military alignment through pointing to Norway, Denmark and countries in the EU that are members of Nato, simultaneously positioning Sweden within this group but also drawing a boundary towards them, indicating that Sweden should also join Nato to be accepted, instead of seen as a weak link: “Other close friends, such as Norway and Denmark, drew as we know this conclusion a long time ago” (regarding Nato membership being more secure than a mere Nordic community), and: “22 out of 28 EU-countries instead trust Nato. All sense speaks for Sweden and Finland to also join” (D21). The friendship theme is also visible through this formulation about Nato: “And despite the myth of neutrality it has always been obvious where we belong: among our democratic friends” (D29). One

editorial quotes a Latvian politician as speaking from someone with experience of Russian occupation: “it is weakness that provokes aggression. Russia respects strength and exploit weakness. Therefore, a powerful message to stand up against Russia is not aggressive” (D225).

In Aftonbladet, the discourse of continuity and success to perpetuate the non-alignment identity is visible also in this time period, but moderated to a new security context with increased tensions in Europe. Generally, non-alignment is constructed more as a security measure than during the previous period. One editorial dismisses accusations of non-alignment being purely idealistic, but instead is a question of “hard boiled realism” because it best protects Sweden based on its geographical position and size (A252). Historical references to a shared national past of 200 years of successful non-alignment are often made, but is now articulated together with the explicit need to rearm the national defense as a precondition for its success (for example, A21; A215; A220; A222; A237; A247). In a defense for Swedish weapons export, one editorial writes that “Without a strong defense and our own defense industry, the military non-alignment is just an empty shell, in that case we are completely dependent on others for our security” (A231; see also A236). Military service is portrayed as something good for the morale of the people (A211, A246). At the same time, the threat image towards Sweden is downplayed, as opposed to DN editorials: “First of all, there is no realistic threat image where only Sweden would be invaded by Russia, which is the scenario where a Nato membership would, without doubt, increase our security” (A247, see also A21). Non-alignment is also constructed as a way to promote detente around the baltic sea, instead of contributing to tensions and arms races by joining Nato (A256; A269). This constructs an image of Sweden as a force for stability and predictability through remaining non-aligned, but rational and aware of tensions and acting responsible by strengthening the national defense. Those promoting Nato membership are instead portrayed as irrational and too eager, always wanting to join Nato regardless of the security context (A25). Two editorials suggest that an official investigation into a Swedish Nato membership would be a waste of money (A228; A222). Boundaries are drawn against Russia, similarly to DN, but they are also drawn against the US, criticizing the nuclear threat power of Nato (A220; A241).

The internationalist aspect of the national identity is less visible during this period than the previous. When the feminist foreign policy and internationalism through UN is mentioned in DN editorials, it is portrayed as toothless and second priority to territorial security and the Ukraine crisis. “No one has any usage of the UN in the case of Ukraine” (D211; see also D214). On the other hand, positioning Sweden with other western Nato countries and emphasizing their democratic quality, as opposed to Russia (D29), could be interpreted as a transformation strategy of focusing Swedish internationalism on promotion of democracy through Nato within Europe, similarly to the argument in the first period.

Aftonbladet perpetuates internationalism and non-alignment through the EU and UN. One editorial argues that Sweden can simultaneously promote their values, and support the UN efforts to uphold respect for international law which protects the interests and security of small states against the power of bigger states: “this regards our view on human rights and our feminist foreign policy, but also more crass issues such as peace, disarmament and respect for international law” (A255; see also A252; A259; A260; A264). In A243, the freedom of action in foreign policy inherent in non-alignment can be seen through the authors emphasis on that Sweden is not *obliged* to support France militarily after the terrorist attack in Paris, but will do so because Sweden acts in solidarity with the EU by choice (A243).

The dialectic relationship (de Cillia et al 1999: 156) between national identity narratives and foreign policy can be seen in how the narrative of Nato membership is constructed as the rational option in DN and thus legitimizes such a shift in foreign policy. The narrative is also informed by the increased tensions and extended Nato cooperation through PFP and now Vårdlandsavtalet. This is part of a historical development of social practice that creates norms, which steers action (Agius 2006: 42). These developments make the idea of Nato less foreign to Sweden, and DN can utilize this by discursively constructing cooperation with Nato as norm and part of the Swedish identity, thus dismantling the non-alignment identity. Aftonbladet recognizes the same development, but aims to transform non-alignment by constructing Nato cooperation as a sign of “Swedish pragmatism”, and not as something that naturally leads towards abandoning non-alignment (A256). Sweden is portrayed as a country that pursues wide cooperation internationally, and Nato is just one among many international

organizations: “Sweden should cooperate within the UN and EU, with the nordic countries and with Nato to, in the best possible way, enhance security in our part of the world” (A212; see also A233). Generally, both non-alignment and internationalism are framed more in terms of security in Aftonbladet compared to the previous period.

4.3 2021-2022

Russia invaded Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022, and the Swedish government decided to apply for Nato membership in May 2022. Aftonbladet changed their official position towards promoting Nato membership on the 20th of April 2022 (A339). In both papers, a shift in tone is visible before and after the Russian invasion and the shift in government position.

In DN before the Social Democrats turned, non-alignment was more intensively dismantled than during previous periods. Non-alignment is described as irresponsible and unrealistic (D31; D333) and a product of a dogmatic Social Democratic party line (D35; see also for example D39; D314). Linguistic means (de Cillia et al 1999: 163) to invoke a European, democratic sameness is combined with a negative self-representation where non-alignment results in weakness, lack of solidarity and hypocrisy. For example,

To claim that our non-alignment does the rest of Europe a ‘favor’ is not only out of touch with reality, but arrogant. Sweden is right now the weakest link on a continent where the majority of countries are part of Nato. (D314)

and “Sweden simply belongs in the Western community of democracies, those who constitute the members of Nato” (D320; see also D340; D315). A boundary is drawn towards Finland, which is described as “Sweden for grown ups” (D317) because of their resolute decision to consider a Nato membership after the Russian invasion of Ukraine (see also D34; D39; D310; D313). The narrative of non-alignment making Sweden weak suggests that the adequate counter action is to join Nato, and abandon the non-alignment identity.

After the Social Democrats started discussing applying for a Nato membership, the tone shifted regarding non-alignment. For example “We will not join Nato because the defense cooperation is free of downsides. But because there are no realistic alternatives” (D322), “there are good reasons both for and against Nato. I, for example, am hesitant towards the idea of entering a defense alliance with a kurd bombing Turkey” (D325), and “after more than 200 years of militar non-alignment we are on our way to abandoning it. I think this is right, but the conformism of the debate is still worrying me, that the pros and cons are not sufficiently discussed” (D327). Paradoxically, as the political context of non-alignment shifted in favor of DN’s standpoint, the non-aligned identity appeared relatively *more* legitimate than before. This shift can be seen as a transformative strategy of the non-alignment identity, where it can still be part of the national identity but rather as an important element of the past. This is an example of how meaning is created in the service of power (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 75). The non-alignment is not an “objectively” irrational stance, but DN constructs it as such as a strategy to dismantle this aspect of the national identity when it was an obstacle to Nato membership.

Aftonbladet, before changing position, continued to pursue discursive strategies to perpetuate non-alignment in a similar way to the previous period, with a strong emphasis on rebuilding the national defense (A32; A315). Positive self representation in terms of independence through non-alignment are also common, for example:

We will keep doing military exercises with whichever country we wish, accept support from whomever we wish and provide support for those we find appropriate. We are since ancient times an independent country, and do not take directives from Moscow (A317).

On February 7th 2022, A319 writes about a suggestion from one party to have a Nato referendum that the Swedes are “[...] completely uninterested in both membership and such a referendum” (A319). When the Aftonbladet position changes, discursive strategies are applied to transform the non-alignment identity, partly in a similar way to DN. It becomes transformed into a part of the national past which also feeds into national identity: “The world has changed. Then, we who act in the world must change as well, although the ghost pain of a worldview, an order one has learned to live with, can be severe” (A340; see also A337; A339). Aftonbladet also makes references to

Finland as a country to act together with (A348; A349; A350), and uses a similar language as DN regarding Sweden as the weak link outside Nato (A345; A349).

The internationalist identity is even less visible in this period than the previous. Some DN editorials, similarly to the previous period, use transformative strategies to create a narrative of a “regional” internationalism, where Sweden should join Nato to promote regional peace and stability (D321; see also D31; D339).

The most important insight from this period is how the shift in government position towards Nato membership illuminates the ideological effects of discourses, how they are constructed to create a narrative that permits certain behavior (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 61-63; Sandman 2019: 33). Before the shift, non-alignment was dismantled by DN editorials through constructing it as irrational and dangerous. Aftonbladet perpetuated non-alignment through constructing it, together with a strong defense, as a policy that enhances security through stability. After the shift, both DN and Aftonbladet instead used transformative strategies to make non-alignment a legitimate part of the common national history.

4.4 Historical comparison and final discussion

My first conclusion from studying the historical development of non-alignment is that the discourses appear to be relatively stable. Texts combine discourses and elements in similar ways across the periods in both papers, which is how intertextuality works to keep dominant discourses stable (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 73-74). This can be explained by the fact that the status quo of non-alignment policy is maintained until the last year of the last period. DN editorials use dismantling strategies throughout all periods, mainly by denying its utility for state security and constructing a national identity narrative of Sweden as a “European Nato state”. At the same time, increasing tensions in Europe and Swedish advancement towards Nato through PFP and the Host Country Agreement legitimizes this narrative. This illustrates the dialectic relationship between national identity narratives and foreign policy (Sandman 2019: 33).

Aftonbladet uses perpetuating strategies throughout all periods, mainly by emphasizing its historical record of successfully keeping Sweden out of wars and using positive self-representations of Swedish internationalism and independence in foreign policy. However, as European tensions increase, the editorials in Aftonbladet begin to combine the “successful non-alignment” identity discourse more with elements of state security, in terms of national defense and enhancing European stability through remaining non-aligned, and less with the internationalist aspects of pursuing an independent foreign policy through the UN. In the first period, non-alignment was seen as an enabler of promoting democracy and peace in the UN (A12). In the second period, non-alignment was constructed as a way both to promote Swedish values, but also to promote international law which protects Swedish state security. In the third period, non-alignment and internationalist ambitions are not articulated together at all. This can be seen as intertextuality as a driver of change (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 73-74). Put differently, the liberal internationalist agenda (Nilsson 2015:38) becomes *disconnected* from the non-alignment identity narrative, when the latter loses its idealistic function (Goetschel 2011: 314). In the last period, non-alignment is only a question of security, and when the threat from Russia increases it also loses its realistic function (Goetschel 2011: 314), and becomes transformed into a part of the common national history. Here, the construction of the non-alignment identity almost merges between the papers. This transformation shows how national identities are unstable and incoherent (De Cilla et al 1999: 154).

The internationalism identity narrative also goes through a transformation over the periods which can be explained by intertextuality (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 73-74). In the first period, DN editorials construct Nato membership as an opportunity to further an internationalist agenda, for example through emphasizing UN and Nato cooperation for peace in Bosnia. Put differently, the discourse of promoting Nato is combined with elements from the internationalist identity to drive change towards disconnecting internationalism from non-alignment, and thus enable Nato membership as a foreign policy option. When tensions increase in the second period, transformative strategies are used to construct the internationalist identity narrative as a Nato endeavor for a “regional European internationalism” to promote peace and stability. In the third period,

internationalism is only seen as a secondary priority to state security through joining Nato. Again, internationalism and non-alignment becomes disconnected.

5. Conclusions and further research

The research question was: How can we understand the historical development of the discursive construction of the Swedish peace identity in terms of non-alignment and internationalism in the media discourse on the Nato membership debate?

My conclusion is that the historical development of the peace identity, culminating in an application to Nato in 2022, can be understood as a gradual disconnection of the meaning of non-alignment from the meaning of internationalism. In the context of increasing tensions in Europe and popular opinion becoming increasingly positive towards a Nato membership, both the discourses on non-alignment and internationalism became increasingly focused on state security, which drove them apart. The link between non-alignment and internationalism which consisted in the idealistic function of the former was discursively removed. In the last period, its realistic function was discursively removed as well. The beginning of a new national identity narrative in the Swedish Nato debate can be distinguished, where non-alignment is part of the common national history and internationalism is geared towards enhancing security and stability in Europe through EU, UN, and Nato.

This study has high internal validity as it is focused on a very specific case of national identity and foreign policy based on data from two newspapers. To increase the external validity of the findings and be able to generalize them, further research could be done on how non-alignment is discursively constructed during critical discourse moments over time in other non-aligned countries such as Switzerland, Ireland and Austria. In this case, I suggest including extra-textual effects in the analysis, as well as taking the individual journalists bias more explicitly into consideration for enhanced internal validity.

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